

"Why, I didn't know Reub Long was dead," whispers the wife.
"You didn't even know he was alive." mocks the husband.
And the argument is cut short
Only by the rain which begins to fall,
The wife covering her head with a highway map
To preserve her hairstyle
As they slog the distance in rubber sandals
Back to the parking lot.

-- Michael Anderson

Ashland OR

POSSESSING EVERY FROZEN DELICACY

The Poet stood before the Servomation machines.
He wanted a chocolate-covered vanilla bar.
Someone had to show Him how to operate
the ice cream machine: "You lift the door
and pull out the ice cream," one of many
followers explained.

He knew Jack Kerouac.
Jack thought He was kind of thin-skinned.

"I can't get the ice cream out,"
He whined. Four or five followers
reached over His shoulders to assist Him.
They were having a great deal of trouble.

William Carlos Williams admired Him
when He was young; Williams has been long
dead.

We were standing there by the Servomation
machines watching all this -- my friend Paul,
a big, slightly loud Vietnam vet, and I --
and Paul suggested, "Blow on it!"
They all stopped and looked at us;
Paul qualified: "If you blow on it, the ice
cream will melt a little and you can take
it out."

Neal Cassady was His lover for a while;
Cassady was practically everybody's lover
for a while.

Finally they got the ice cream bar out
for Him. All they had to do was pull up
the shelf it rested on. Paul said, in his

rather carrying voice, "God, what a dipshit." But the Poet was magnanimous to all who assisted Him in the ice cream problem. Soon He would reward them with a reading. He looked like a fat Woody Allen.

THE CRYING OF SARAH

Through our thin walls I hear the young family next door. The husband and wife share that sort of relationship which, though it may not be based on hate, hate is but a hair's breath away. And in the middle I hear the crying of Sarah.

Plainly, the young man is unhappy with his lot, most of his time at home he taunts his wife and bangs around pieces of furniture. The wife possesses a whining, I-told-you-so voice; because of its high-pitched, shrieking quality, and the way the wall muffles only low noises while allowing the upper-registers to seep through, there is the eerie illusion of listening to her argue with herself. Occasionally, I hear the thud of a piece of furniture being hurled across the room.

Amidst all this I can easily discern Sarah's crying. One subject the couple agree on is that Sarah is a "brat." "Goddamnit!" the wife screams a few moments after whiningly reproaching her husband, "Shut up, Sarah, shut up!" "Shut up!" the husband barely comes through in his muffled, low, manly voice, "you fuckin' little brat!" He then, I gather by the protestations of the young mother, locks the year-old infant in the bathroom, at which point epithets are reissued at each other. A silence then permeates between the two adults, and the only sound to be heard is Sarah's crying; she is not whimpering -- these walls do not let through mere whimpering -- these are wails, wails from the inner body, from deep down in the diaphragm, the cry of an injury that will never heal.

That is when I rise from the sofa and turn up the stereo.

-- Gary Holcomb

Long Beach CA